

six Ways Sherlock and John didn't reunite, and the one fucked up way that they did

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This exercise in writing was born back in 2014 in an email exchange about The Empty Hearse and the unsatisfactory way the first meeting between John and Sherlock after The Reichenbach Fall was managed in the script. It was abandoned due to unrelated circumstances, but the authors feel it is still relevant to the development of the characters as far as series 3 goes: therefore this late posting.

the meta

Things that went wrong with this meeting:

1. They were in a public place.
2. There was another person who knew John and ostensibly knew about Sherlock and his importance in John's life, but Sherlock didn't know about her.
3. Sherlock was summoned back by Mycroft.

In the original series, Sherlock does come back out of necessity to tie up the last piece of the puzzle about Moriarty. But Mycroft isn't involved with it. Sherlock comes back on his own. While I don't doubt that Sherlock wouldn't have come back to London if he hadn't felt like he could, I wish that Mycroft wasn't involved.

I can't see any scenario which involves these three elements resulting in a good reunion between John and Sherlock. The first two are especially important to Sherlock, the third would be particularly important to John.

All it takes is for Sherlock to look at John's face to know that Mycroft never told him, that John thought all this time that Sherlock was dead. So he backpedals immediately, is immediately vulnerable: *short version, not dead*. He has a completely 180° turn in mood and countenance and he starts talking very fast to try and say all the things that he needs to say to make John understand.

How Sherlock faked his death is essential to *why*. Sherlock derives his understanding of human motivation from the actions of people, he says that the ring hasn't been polished for a long time, therefore she must be having an affair-- not the other way around. Most people would look for motive first, then for the evidence to follow, but Sherlock works by induction. Instead of deduction, where you take one central idea and apply that to what's seen, he looks first, and then works up to motive and ultimately, suspect. John dismissing Sherlock's *how* is essentially the same

thing as dismissing his *why*. He's not listening. He was willing to listen to Sherlock go on and on about his method before, but now he's not. Eyes and ears are closed. Oh dear. This is deeper than I thought. I'm not convinced that Sherlock is mistaking John's *why* question (why did he fake his death *versus* why didn't he tell John). Those two questions are intimately linked in his chain, and it only makes sense to start at the beginning. Because Sherlock depends on chains of events, reasonings, one thing leading to the next, to the next, to the outcome. *How* is the same as *why* is the same as **why**. He knows that he's being judged right now-- not only by John, but by Mary, whom he doesn't know.

It was Mycroft's idea. He's telling the truth, but then Mary gets it derailed by pointing out the John that Mycroft knew Sherlock was alive, while John didn't. She's just making it worse. I'm pretty sure this is the part where Sherlock is trying to tell John that he was supposed to know, but the conversation keeps getting away from him, and John keeps attacking him.

This conversation is working on two completely different levels. Sherlock's *I've nearly been in contact so many times, but* is genuine in tone. Then John laughs at him in disbelief, which is when he starts saying the whole song and dance about fearing John would be indiscreet. *Overreacting* is channelling Mycroft (?), and/or his own demons from childhood.

Sherlock adopts the squid tactics when John laughs at him. It's an ingrained reflex, developed in years of confronting alone the likes of Wilkes or Donovan.

Now it's clear that John has joined the other side. (The train scene will show that Sherlock has not yet given him up for lost, not really, and is ready for a last-ditch attempt).

Sherlock tries again. The quiet tones and real eyes. I mean, he says *London is in danger* etc., but his voice is *and I need your help*. That's the central part of it. I wonder when Sherlock got into the habit of saying the important words first (London, terrorist, attack) and the words he means second. He does this a lot. John zeroes in on *your help* and throws it in his face (not only that, but looks at Mary before throwing it in Sherlock's face). And then Sherlock tries for the adventure thing, if John won't help for the sake of friendship.

In the end, the explanation is given through a video. Sherlock doesn't tell John because John isn't interested in the how, which *is* the why. I can't believe that he ordered Sherlock into the mind palace, like forcing someone into a cave. But Sherlock did find something-- that off button.

How could the meeting have gone, given three absolutes: Sherlock and John must have their reunion in a very public place. Sherlock and John must reunite in front of a third person, who knows them both, but Sherlock doesn't necessarily *know* them.

The key to this is that Sherlock is blindsided. I mean, the equivalent for John would be for the meeting to take place with Mycroft and Sherlock... at Buckingham Palace (1). Or Lestrade and John, the former dampening the flammable character of the latter (2). Or Irene and Sherlock (4, 6, 7). Irene would serve as a better touchstone to bring back John's second sight. The sight which used to see Sherlock through his armour, and which he seems to have lost after the Fall.

Irene would be the third person who, given the restraints, would have balanced the terms between them.

There were some choices made in the writing that I feel like, in some ways made it a rigged game. Like, they felt like Sherlock was so unjustified and wrong and careless in his not telling John, that the only way the friendship could possibly be salvaged was if John's life was threatened and Sherlock came running to the rescue.

The disguise as a waiter is a bad practical joke pulled by a teenager who hasn't developed the tool to express emotion, because hasn't developed the tools to recognise it.

The question remains open whether the teenager is Sherlock or Moffitts.

A conversation with Mycroft, Sherlock, and John (????) would have been tipped completely in favour of Sherlock, effectively ambushing John. Which I feel is what happened to Sherlock in TEH. Though the tipping against Sherlock in TEH wasn't premeditated, while a meeting between them and Mycroft would definitely be.

Mycroft works/lives in a white mansion but his room is completely dark, different from the lovely desk and sitting room we saw before. There is light from windows, but it looks like narrow windows on a ceiling or at least high up, nothing that provides a view. The door is like that of a prison cell with only a tiny handle on the inside. There is a loud noise of a bolt when Anthea comes in.

I get the impression from Mycroft and Sherlock's exchange in TEH that Sherlock expected Mycroft to tell John that Sherlock was alive, at some point, but Mycroft never did. And Mycroft clearly thought that Sherlock would contact John himself, since John is *his* friend (they seem very... *these are mine and those are yours* about people dear to them).

So actually, it's not all Sherlock's fault for not having contacted John. Which explains why he's so at a loss and explanations seem inadequate when the reveal and apologies finally come (also why he thought the restaurant disguise would be a good idea). Mycroft *does* say that he kept *a weather eye on him*, and I think Sherlock takes that to mean he told John about Sherlock being alive; Mycroft has been known to be broad and vague about a lot of things. Sherlock is kind of blithe about it all, because he thought John knew he was alive, and waiting to be allowed back to London.

Later, in Baker Street, the dialogue between the brothers goes:

S-- I used to think I was an idiot.

M-- Both of us thought you were an idiot, Sherlock. We had nothing else to go on, until we met other children.

It suggests a long period of isolation from others, suggests that they took on definite roles: "the smart one" and "the pretty one" (or the smart one and the musical one, the athletic one, etc., which begs the question, what was Sherlock, if he wasn't the smart one?)

Then:

M-- Oh yes. Friends. Of course, you go in for that sort of thing now.

S-- And you don't.

Bam. Right there. Sherlock nailing Mycroft for his mistake. For not telling John that Sherlock was alive, when it's clear Sherlock trusted Mycroft to do it for him. After all, Mycroft was the one who approved of John and allowed him to "pass" when they first met, going through the whole elaborate meeting and interview thing.

S-- Ever?

Sherlock is making a realisation about Mycroft right now. It's like the light came on. He's in the middle of grilling Mycroft for not telling John, and he sees that somehow, Mycroft is blind to the whole idea of friendship. Sherlock is learning something about his brother that he now knows, and Mycroft doesn't, and this is possibly the first time and place that he knows something that Mycroft doesn't, at all. At this point, it's like the roles

have been reversed. Usually Mycroft names the game, how and when. Sherlock is doing that now, and in fact, they go on to their favourite game, Deductions. I have the feeling that Sherlock is realising something very important about himself and Mycroft and finally getting out of that shadow. The biggest development is that in the end Sherlock isn't angry at Mycroft, doesn't blame Mycroft for not telling John. He sees that John was never important to Mycroft as he was to Sherlock. Mycroft understood John's importance insofar as it touched Sherlock's life, but John never touched Mycroft, personally. No-one has touched Mycroft the way that John touched Sherlock. It wouldn't occur to Mycroft that it might be important *to Sherlock* that John knew he was alive. And Sherlock, instead of getting angry at Mycroft, empathises. I sort of get the feeling that perhaps Sherlock is the closest thing to a *goldfish* (friend) that Mycroft has ever had, but even that role was warped because of the situation they found themselves in as children.

Have you noticed how often Sherlock will not only look at things, but smell them? While Mycroft will take a cursory glance and one sniff, Sherlock will look very intensely and take overt sniffs and touches, because, I suspect, he needed to in order to keep up with a rigged game Mycroft liked to play in deductions. I wouldn't be surprised if this is where Mycroft cruelly called him a hound dog, literally. I don't think it would have been a purposeful remark, more like a careless aside that struck Sherlock deeply. That he was *sniffing like a hound dog*.

Mycroft at the treadmill in a tracksuit. There is a suit of armour in the room. Is he training to fit into the armour?

Mycroft is hostage to his position and to the people he answers to. Which means that every move he takes to keep Sherlock safe has the drawback of involving Sherlock in the same trap. (I'm thinking of a fish trap, a submerged cage with a funnel entrance: easy to go in, comfortably wide, but impossible to get out, and the fish doesn't realise they're caught until the trap is pulled out of the water).

The risk for both brothers is becoming prisoners of a "bad Starfleet" situation, without the advantage of interstellar distance to escape.

Sherlock shows off whenever the conditions are there, to whomever is there. Sherlock's mistake is assuming that those who saw him show off will forget him after the first flash of reaction (any reaction: a negative one is better than nothing). *He* will delete them, so he takes as a given that they will delete him too. But they don't, and this is what Moriarty/Brook banked on.

There is a poisonous equation in Sherlock's mind: Only those who give positive proof of being brilliant really exist. If you want to exist, you must be brilliant. But you'll never really make it, because under your occasional fireworks you're an idiot (= "a fake" = a hound dog who locates his rabbit and runs after it with loud barks, but in the end never catches it).

When John revisits Baker Street, the words ringing in his head are *that's the craziest thing I've ever done* and *you invaded Afghanistan*, both of them references to when they first met and Sherlock held out to John an unexpected lifeline. John didn't have to discard the new set of eyes he had gotten from war, Sherlock valued him for it. He never wanted John to fix himself and "get over" the experience in Afghanistan. He took him as he was. He said, implicitly, that he doesn't see anything wrong with John-- a subtle difference, but key. Sherlock never tried to fix John: he's not so patronising, if John wants to be fixed, he will do it himself. Sherlock knows that John didn't miss the war per se (he was truthful when he says he's seen "far too much" of it), but rather he missed the teamwork, and the solidarity between/among people who are risking their life together every day for something that matters. "You and me against the world", key words being "you and me".

John has seen enough random death, both as a doctor and a soldier, that maximising his chances to die for a good cause sounds like a very good idea. It took some time for Sherlock to articulate the immediate impression his prospect for a flatmate made on him. He's been strangely grateful to have followed a hunch.

Now in TEH one still compares to a state of “normality” and is making an allowance, an exception for the deviation, the other doesn't. It contributes to the dead look in John's eyes. Grief, on the one hand, but also lost sight.

Mrs. Hudson says the moustache ages John. I think she's right. He's trying it on. Like, *this is the new face of John Watson, the John Watson who has moved on from life with Sherlock Holmes*. And it's evident his grief was really deep (not even one phone call to Mrs. Hudson), but he *shrugs* when he says he's sorry. Um... not the John from before. He's closed off something. The shrug says it all. *Sorry but not sorry, care but not really*.

I wished that they could have had a talk. A private talk, without Mary, without John going ballistic and Sherlock with overflowing happiness at seeing John again. At their flat in Baker Street (3, 5), without the lights on.

the stories

1. Sherlock, Mycroft, and John, at Buckingham Palace.

Sherlock not dressed, again in a fit of pique.



Sherlock (Shadow to Self):

What do you do when you're trying to come back from the dead and whatever social abilities you've learned come from a mother who talks a lot more than your father who just doesn't know how to relate?

They live out of town, never lived in London, come to see the Tower and Les Mis like southern, middle class, fairly well to do tourists who feel they deserve a treat after rising two strange, difficult sons, paying for tutors at home and later posh schools where they learned to dress, speak, comport themselves.

What do you do when your education was in fact taken over by your older brother, leading you on as though the both of you were alone in a world of your own which the common people can't access, where you're the only ones to know the language, and are mapping it together like illuminating another Voynich Codex. Weighted with the terrible awareness of being more intelligent than your parents. Meeting for each other needs that no-one knew about.

What do you do when the only other living human being on your planet of birth is a frighteningly brilliant brother who tried hard to pick up the slack where your parents clearly failed and whom you've been trying, desperately and in vain, to best for thirty years.

What do you do with John immediately asking if your parents knew. Mycroft trying to soften the shock by dragging out Mother ("She worries"). But at this point John is harping on a point and you won't tell him because John isn't actually interested, and wouldn't accept/believe the actual explanation... ..that you couldn't. You'd have given a pint of your own blood (another pint of your blood) to tell him, but you wouldn't give a pint of his, so you didn't tell.

There seems to be no obvious way to restore communication with John Watson. Something got broken and you don't know how to fix it.

You can always get back at Mycroft in a way that you both understand (like having him sit through Les Mis with your parents). You know it will be brought up obliquely many times, you're not the type to "forgive and forget", wrongs are sorted out over many small side battles. You have a system of sorting them out. You have lost the ability to do that with John.

John and his Mary, who are in the habit of going together to visit your grave. John, the tip of the scales already falling toward normality, an uneasy transition by any means but fuelled by the absurd idea that, even if Sherlock were still around, he's getting too old for this shit.

Mycroft kept "a weather eye" on him. Now you know that it only means he was ready to prevent him from killing himself. Mycroft still comes across to you as a being endowed with omniscience and almightiness, a wielder of miracles. You can't but feel that this time he didn't produce one in order to purposefully spite you. You also know that, according to evidence, your immediate impression must be wrong. Yet whether he even missed you these two years remains in doubt. You did, though, surprising as it may be. You find yourself contemplating his plight, playing so hard and never winning.

Curious how sometimes you yearn to the status of goldfish.

You hoped for an immediate reconnection, counted on a welcoming smile or at the very least that John would be open to listening.

You thought you would start at the beginning, at the last point in time when he saw you alive. You would bring him up-to-date in a step-by-step way, so that at the end John will feel included again, in the know with every detail, especially those you had to keep from him until now.

What you find is a Watson very much alive, betrothed to a woman, and ready to bite your head off.

Even this you are willing to accept.

John is alive. John is not actively grieving anymore and has plans with his fiancée. This is what you died for. It is enough.

Mycroft (ego to self):

Mummy is going to be a problem. She worries. Most of all, she worries when the situation is uncertain, a frequent eventuality when Sherlock is concerned. All the more so as she was never around when the main events happened, nor listening when she should have. All the more so as she also worries in Father's stead. I wish he would balance accounts by doling out reassurance. Of course, one cannot give what one lacks. Enter First Son.

Mobile phones *are* useful sometimes.

Now John is harping on his point and Sherlock is not giving him an answer because John is not actually interested. John would not accept the actual explanation anyway. Stalemate. I need to *do* something to break it. We have eight more minutes before our welcome here is outstayed.

John is being an idiot, which he usually is not. He is the idiot blogger who sold his friend's safety for a bunch of peacock's feathers. He never cared to realise what he had done, making Sherlock a public figure, something as recognizable and grotesque as a bad disguise, which equals a target. Now he is faulting Sherlock for something which is most definitely not his fault. John does not even see him. "Blind with rage".

If I read Sherlock correctly, this is the most bitter outcome of his childish hope in a warm welcome from John and an apokathastasis of his personal and professional life. As soon as the news of his return will leak out, he will once again become Sherlock Holmes, the Great Detective. A role he cannot endure without John's support. Being Sherlock Holmes in public without John Watson at his side... It would be like committing hara-kiri with a blade John himself handed him.

Even so, even now that John is glaring silent daggers at him and Sherlock's ears are getting pinker by the second, I would bet that Sherlock would go to any lengths to try and produce a rabbit from a hat, in the hope that John will forgive him. When he slipped into his Belstaff coat and wrapped his scarf around his neck, his face smooth from the shave, his scars and fresher wounds wrapped up and hidden, he looked like he was dressing for battle, or a duel to the death by which he hopes to win back his love. If he should fail, or worse, if John should manage to pull him down to the level of common mortals, i.e. in the gutter, Sherlock may be shocked into acknowledging his pain. He was in hell and kept going, but this would stop him. Break him. Which mistake did we make, that Sherlock still believes in just retribution? He must feel like he's fallen into a strange disquieting world where apologies aren't accepted, forgiveness is very much qualified, and honour is very much not given to merit. Belief is an emotional investment, that is, an error. A potentially deadly one, especially when it involves believing other people's opinions about oneself. Things were much easier when Sherlock was younger and would serenely take in the factual elements of the neverending spectacle of life&death. Live maggots in roadkill. Dead strangers. Dead grandparents. Once we burned an old caricature that was drawn of him by his schoolmates. Sherlock was seven: he said that he heard voices constantly demanding more of him, criticising him and berating him for every choice he had ever made. We did it outside, burning the paper in a small pot on a bright and windy day in February. It resisted burning multiple times, and once it was all burned, it continued to produce this horrifying smoke.

But I need to focus. Sherlock wanted me here for a reason. I am to play Successful Awkwardness to shield his Sorry Awkwardness. My best option is playing on John's ambivalence about one strength which looked like a weakness. Betrayal and death.

"John!"

"What?!"

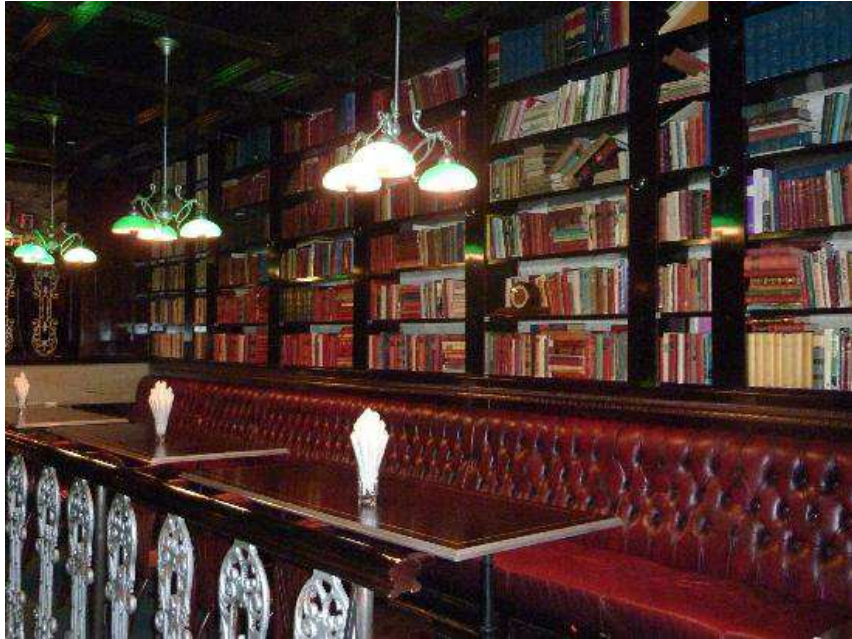
"Have you ever told Sherlock how exactly you were shot in Afghanistan?"

CUE: the events involved John risking his life to save Maj. Sholto's, in a way that made him look in the eyes of his surviving comrades like he was a coward.



2. Lestrade and John, at a pub after hours not far from the Met.

They've had for a while the tradition of getting drinks together. This time Lestrade's melancholy is turning into black humour and ridiculous scenarios about Sherlock surviving the fall, John adding details and corrections. Sherlock walks in.



Sherlock is a show-off. It carried him over his teen years, his sentence at uni, his time adrift in London, and the early months after DI Lestrade, by some miracle, noticed him and allowed him access to crime scenes.

After those early months, Sherlock knew that Lestrade had begun to see through him with disturbing accuracy, but Greg never called him out, so Sherlock kept up the game.

If nothing else, it duped the forensics.

If nothing else, it made him feel ...somebody.

He feels nobody now, looking in from the pub window to his two friends sitting at a corner table, nursing their beers. There is warmth and soft light inside, darkness and a chilly drizzle where he stands. He looks and tries to see.

It's not coming so easy anymore. Back in London, he feels like everything is subtly changed -- one-way roads, shops, ads, old buildings razed, new buildings in their place. It is the same with people. Two years, and he hears different turns of phrase on the streets, reads newspaper titles playing on new puns. He is too hurt and exhausted to be comforted by what has remained the same, all the more so as, while he watches them unseen, he realises that John and Greg are also changed.

Greg's hair has greyed. His good man face has new lines, and they are sad ones. He is a little too lean, his clothes a little more frayed, the skin on his hands shows a little more veins. When he smiles, it looks like he's also smiling with regret at his own naiveté. Sherlock is taken by the unexpected whim to take his hand and comfort him, tell him that it is all right now, it is over for good.

But when he looks at John, Sherlock shivers. John looks like a block of ice, like he brings with him a small personal glaciation. It is the face he had when they first got acquainted, and how it weighs can be clearly seen in the way John has reverted to his military poise: like any wrong movement could unsettle the burden and topple him. He has greyed too, but it's less noticeable among his pale hair. His jaw seems tense even when he speaks or takes a sip from his pint. His hands are always curled around something- as though they could get up to some revelatory mischief if he didn't keep them busy. Sherlock finds that he doesn't know this man so well anymore. Perhaps he never did, and they fell in sync thanks to some unaccountable miracle. But the miracle was interrupted, the thread broken in a fall from a roof, and Sherlock is afraid. Afraid of John, like of an unknown entity.

And what does Sherlock do in front of the unknown?

He goes and investigates.

The voices of his friends reach him as he steps through the entrance and into the pub.

"No, no, no, let's go back to the corpse. It's not so easy to get one ready and similar enough to fool you of all people."

"He must have been him. You know the old trick with the rubber ball."

“Come on, that was just a quotation from *The Great Escape*. Molly is sure of it. And if ever there was one who could fool death, it was... Well, you know who it was.”

“Who, me?”

Both men turn to stare at him. Sherlock, there in a pub at quarter to nine in the evening, pulling out his gloves one finger at a time and smiling at them a warmer smile than they ever saw on him.

In a moment Lestrade jumps to his feet, not caring that his chair falls back in his wake, and clasps Sherlock in a bear hug.

“You *bastard*!”

Three seconds, and Lestrade steps back and motions toward John, who is still sitting but has closed his eyes and is breathing rapidly.

“John.”

“No.”

“John...”

“NO!”

Heads turn their way, but as the seconds pass, the three men in their tight circle of relief and pain fall from attention.

“John, please.”

John takes a deep slow breath and points to a chair in front of him across the table.

“Sit there.”

There is no mistaking an order. Sherlock sits, and waits. If nothing else, in there two years he has indeed learned about timing.

Another deep breath, and John opens his eyes, which are curiously bright in the low lights. Their gaze meets. Sherlock automatically joins his hands under his chin, but John reaches out and catches Sherlock’s.

“I...” John gulps. “I imagined this moment many times. I knew it would never come, but I imagined it all the same. Even now that I am engaged to be married, and should have my mind full of other things, I keep imagining it. For the longest time I thought I would beat you until you were brought away in a wheelbarrow. Then I would patch you up and beat you black and blue all over again. You damn deserter. I believed we were a team. But no, you had to do it all on your own, whatever the heck you were doing, and leave me behind with your death for company.”

John turns his eyes away, then again stares at Sherlock.

“Then I found that I missed you too much. Too much to be anything than happy if ever you started making miracles and came back ...home. So after all I am not going to punch you, although you deserve it. You have no idea how it was for me here. Even after I met my Mary.”

“You have no idea how it was for him out there either, wherever he was all this time.” Lestrade speaks quietly, the softness of joy and a layer of worry under his words.

“No. No, I don’t. You are right. A deserter’s life is hardly easy, is it? But I can’t take anymore right now. We will talk later.”

3. Sherlock, Mrs. Hudson and John at Baker Street.

“Like a mother, I delivered you to your life through the pain of childbirth.

“Like a son, you now cry *How could you do this to me?*”

For days Sherlock has watched the comings and goings at 221b Baker Street. He has disguised himself as an idle unemployed welder on an early pub crawl, as a deliverer of flyers for Tesco and as a door-to-door salesman of esoteric books by an obscure printing house.

He has seen Mrs. Hudson go out grocery shopping (older, more frail, hair styling neglected) and once or twice Lestrade paying her a visit, but not John. Never John.

Until one day here he is.

He is coming from the tube station, a touch of reluctance in his step. He stands for a moment on the corner. Then he squares his shoulders and steps forward to the door. The bell rings.

Sherlock had no plans in mind, but right now a plan has him. Today he has been hiding in plain sight, just changing into jeans and a corded sweater, glasses and a slouching posture. He finds himself uncurling, pocketing the glasses, stepping over the curb and reaching John just as Mrs. Hudson opens the door.

“Oh! Oh my boys! How... how can you be here? Come in, come in the both of you!”

In haste she pushes them inside, slams the door.

Three astonished people standing in a circle in the narrow hall.

For a moment nobody moves.

Mrs. Hudson is the first to snap out of her unbelieving stare, while John unsteadily goes and sits on the second step of the stairs.

“My dearest boy, let me see you. You are so thin...”

Sherlock flinches under her embrace.

“What did they do to you? Are you hurt?”

“No, I’m not now, Mrs. Hudson. I am quite fine. But won’t you sit down and let us make you some tea?”

The two of them move to the kitchen of 221a, where Sherlock clumsily searches for the kettle and crockery until Mrs. Hudson pushes him seated and takes over.

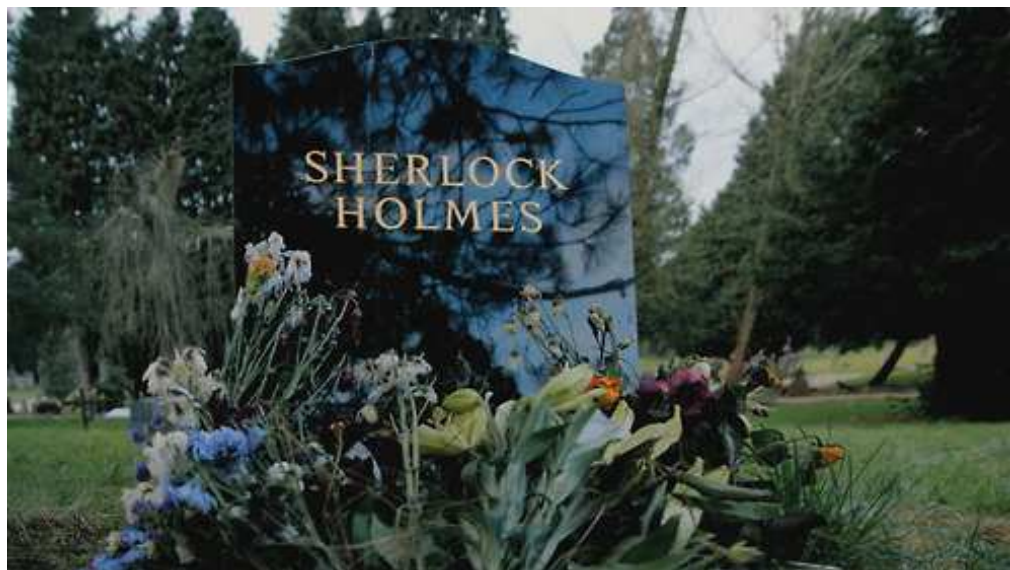
“John, won’t you join us? It’s **ages** since we had tea together.”

John comes in, steps to stand in front of Sherlock’s chair, then he bends down to hug him.

Sherlock smells like early springtime and tarmac at night.



4. Sherlock, Irene, and John at the cemetery.



Irene (to Self):

God I love Mrs. Hudson. She's a dear. Blithely going on and saying things that others wouldn't say for sorry excuses such as tact. They're friends at this point, I think. She gets away with saying things he doesn't want to hear, good on her.

She sees what most other people miss. That Sherlock is guarding John's interests. That he has a strange habit of wanting to see him happy.

And here he is, Capt. John Watson, RAMC. Just where I knew he would come, today.

John is shorter than average. He looks taller because of the way he carries himself. Look at him standing at attention in front of the polished headstone.

I hear Sherlock shuffling beside me as we hide behind the low branches of a yew tree.

I am only here as a sort of referee, in case things should slip –let's say in an adversarial mood. I really hope they won't, but the longer Sherlock waits, the more likely it becomes that his appearance will cause more tension than relief. I know about both, and the moment of balance has definitely come, now.

We had a couple of long talks, the two of us. He's such a brilliant mind, but behind the brilliance, areas of deep darkness. Such a pity he's not a client... But no, better not. I am already taken, and any form of liaison between us would spell danger or ruin to either or both.

I had to explain so much to him. Pierce the bubble of postulates his brother wove around him in the mistaken attempt at keeping him safe. Sometimes he reminds me of those old gods: Want to plant a useful practical rule into the collective mind of a people? Couch it as a religious duty. Wash your hands up to your elbows before eating. Rinse those cicad palm cores twenty times in cold water before cooking; madness comes to those who don't. Forbid the eating of pork: pigs don't fare well in dry, hot climates. Mycroft tends to do the same every time he manages to corner his brother, and doesn't realise that he only feeds Sherlock's ambivalence about himself.

Sherlock's nature, character, qualities and upbringing have tragically stamped in his mind the idea that he is useless at most of common human activities, except at using his intuition and his intellect to detect chains of factual causality. So he trained himself to excellence in this field. His whole idea of himself as worth living is linked to being able to find out things, *alone*.

When he met John, he found someone who appreciates precisely this: his brilliance in finding out things on his own. In this light, many of the contrasts between them find an explanation. Sherlock doesn't purposely leave John behind: it's just that god forbid he admits needing anyone's help.

Then there is the whole mess with "who protects whom". John doesn't miss war or friends, perhaps doesn't even really miss women, but he does miss the endorphin rush of doing his part to excellence as part of a unit. His vocation is being the best doctor, within a perfectly trained squad, in the worst situation. Sherlock's position is simpler as well as harder: he misses someone specific to protect. Like Redbeard. The hard part is that, if he fails, he

feels it's his fault and no-one else's. There is no "other" to share the guilt with, the regret, the grief. There is non "next time" to make better, because his dedication is given to someone unique.

I can't forget Sherlock's expression when I suggested that this different idea of protection is possibly at the root of their misunderstandings. John doesn't see that the word "friend", pronounced by Sherlock, has a completely different meaning. The same as "Christmas", but this is nothing to laugh about. Sherlock doesn't realise the import that the word "colleague" has for John. It means that he is not a tourist in a war zone, but a team-mate, and a most competent one.

So John protects Sherlock by risking his own life, and Sherlock acknowledges the fact. Sherlock protects John by keeping him away from danger (because "alone protects me –from losing you"), but John doesn't acknowledge him, barking out instead that "friends protect people".

Of course in the few occasions when Sherlock is scared, that is when the Mycroftian bubble is pricked, and he asks John for help, his plea remains unheard. John needs to see only the strength and brilliance of his mate, because he feels he can't be the best on his own. John can't be a team of only one.

I worry that this selective blindness of John's will sooner or later hide from him some real danger. He may become too entangled into a scene in his own mind to be aware that Sherlock is literally dying in front of him.

Look at me-- John is jealous that I may try to take his place as Sherlock's team-mate, while I have been working to put them together again. John the dog-trainer and Sherlock, that poor Presley's Hound Dog, unable to catch his rabbit even when it's all lighted up. I wish them both to have something to fear and hope about, to die for and know their death is meaningful. Something which makes them *not alone. But it must be the same thing for both, and so far it wasn't.

"What do you say, should I go?"

"No time like the present. Dinner later?"

"I count on being engaged."

Sherlock approaches John.

And look, now John faints.

I believe they will be all right now, and if not now, then soon.

5. Sherlock and John, in their front room at Baker Street, at night, without lights on.

*Ed ecco, mi sono levato in piedi
e sono andato.
Voli di pipistrelli sui miei passi.
Ho guardato negli occhi senza palpebre
l'oscuro drago addormentato,
ne ho ritratto l'effigie,
mi sono allontanato incolume.
Al ritorno, la mia casa era diversa
(o ero io, cambiato).
Sono tornato solo, come si è soli
dopo le grandi imprese.
Ho gettato il cristallo
nero come la morte a sciogliersi
nell'acqua-che-corre-per-sempre.
Ho lavato via le acque tiepide del Lete,
quelle fredde dello Stige, e di nuovo
ho mangiato il cibo dei vivi,
bevuto la loro bevanda.
Tutto non sarà mai più
come prima.*

Then I rose
and I went.
Flights of bats along my footsteps.
I stared in the lidless eyes
of the dark sleeping dragon,
I drew its image,
I retired unharmed.
On my return, the house felt different
(or was it I, who had changed).
I was alone like one is alone
after a great feat.
I threw the crystal
black as death to dissolve

He dons his clothes, slips in his coat.

John without him.
With a fiancée. And a moustache.

John's empty chair. The whole acoustics
of the room, altered.
For the worse.

The place too silent.



in water-that-runs-forever.
I washed away
the tepid waters of the Lethe,
the chilled ones of the Styx,
and again I
ate the food of the living,
drank their beverage.
All shall never be
as before.

It was after the long jerky dream of
cocaine, after
the nightmare of detox, all the more
frightening for being reality.
When he emerged, a pale and too-thin
shell,
he had no memory
of having disappeared without a word.
He only knew that after all that had
happened,
one thing he wanted,
and that was him.
He wanted his cool mind as well as his
warm body,
and the easy acceptance
like stepping with his violin
into a fugue by Bach.
He went and found him,
as soon as he could stand and walk about
alone.

He tries in vain
to wash three years away
under the shower jet.

Fish and chips, eaten while standing,
ready for --what?
Saving John's life.

He spoke to him in earnest,
serious like he never
was with another man.
He thought his effort
and his plead
could be enough.
They weren't.
He was thrown out.
Reality for him
from now on would entail
being sober,
and alone.
He only accepted it
for the sake of what had cost him.
But next time, next time
--he promised to himself--
if ever I have to beg,
I'll make it into a joke.



6. John, Sherlock, Irene meet in Piccadilly Circus. The traffic and bustle allow some paradoxical privacy.

Seeing John again is almost like writing with a square nib pen and liquid ink after years of ballpoints, watching the tiny sparkles on the wet surface flash and wane against the light as the ink dries.



(almost)
(almost dead)
(almost dead from a fake fall)
(almost dead from being chained to walls and beaten for real)

The problem with torture is twofold.

One: it hurts.

Two: it takes almost more pride to withstand than even Sherlock can easily muster on any given day, to say nothing of a week or two.

Sherlock's speech as John's best man will be like a funeral, reading his own uneulogic obituary at his best friend's wedding. Everybody hearing what they expected to hear, nobody --not even John-- listening to what is really said, -logic falling from eu- into un- like Sherlock himself fell from a rooftop, once.



**0. John is going to propose to Mary during a dinner out at a restaurant.
Sherlock tracks down John and appears impersonating a waiter.**



The most important moment in his life. More important than the first time Lestrade locked eyes with him. More important than the dizzy second after he jumped from St. Bart's roof, the low sky of London spitting him out like an apricot stone.

Sherlock is raw and open after his two-year ordeal. He has the prize at arm's reach-- and he's frightened. So he turns his fear into a game, giving his uncomfortable emotions a safe outlet, like a cat will play with a dead prey that had been dangerous and hard to catch.

Safe outlet? It turns out to be all but safe.

There is an odd person out, an unwanted third. The other people (mostly couples, three little groups, one middle-aged man stood up by a much younger woman) do not count, but this woman does, she's too near and her eyes see too much. Sherlock knows that he could wait, account for this woman and choose another time and place, but he can't, he **needs**, and needs right now.

As it will soon turn out, this woman (who doesn't beat him; who understands Sherlock's plight better than John; who does listen to Sherlock; who promises to talk John around, and in fact does; who is readable and interesting, a combination as rare as Irene's un-readability, and who doesn't think twice about taking part in a conversation in which she should have nothing to say) is the best bit in a reunion which Sherlock dreamed about for seven hundred and thirty days and nights, and which goes spectacularly wrong.

Mary Morstan looks and sees.

John seems to have stared so long at the hole where Sherlock used to be, that he can't see him again when he returns. John's eyes are still filled with a two-dimensional Sherlock silhouette, a cartoon character endowed with press-button omniscience, a super-human entity who would never, ever jump from a rooftop, and if he did, he would fly away, light as a kestrel, on stretched arms and floating coat. There is no place left in John's eyes for the (very wounded) living being in front of him, whose arms were so recently stretched by chains for underground torture and who is going to almost die twice in front of him without John even realise.

Sherlock is ready to try absolutely anything in order to be seen again, or at least looked at: even wearing the cartoon character's clothes and "go out to be Sherlock".

John has left the country of those who have nothing to lose, where he had instantly recognised and acknowledged Sherlock as a fellow citizen, and has joined Mary in the country of those who have much to lose. Too much. And the two countries have kept an often broken, always uneasy truce since time immemorial.

The rift begins with a collision, fist against cheek in a restaurant. The shocks settle in stages, are staged in public houses progressively more drab. "State of the marriage right there". After, there is the relentless rip, stitch after stitch, and every word exchanged is an inch lost.